

# **Articles on the US-North Korea crisis (X) - Winter Olympics olive branch: North & South Korea 'open to dialogue' (not Trump)**

Thursday 4 January 2018, by [BORGER Julian](#), [GAMBINO Lauren](#), [McCURRY Justin](#), [Press Agencies](#) (Date first published: 3 January 2018).

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## **My button is bigger than Kim's (Trump)**

**President intervenes with provocative tweet after North Korea leader said his own launch button was always 'on my desk'.**

Donald Trump has taunted North Korea's leader about the size of his nuclear arsenal after his UN envoy, Nikki Haley, dismissed the value of proposed high-level talks between Pyongyang and Seoul.

The US president used Kim Jong-un's New Year's Day speech as the basis for his latest provocative tweet against the leader, whom he has previously referred to as "little rocket man", saying the "nuclear button" in Washington is "much bigger and more powerful" than Kim's - "and my button works!".

In the speech, Kim warned the United States his country's nuclear forces were now "completed", adding that the nuclear launch button was always within easy reach.

Trump's retort came hours after Haley distanced the White House from proposed contacts between North and South Korea, saying it would not take any talks seriously if Pyongyang did not abandon its nuclear arsenal. A few hours later on Wednesday, the North reopened a vital line of communication with South, raising hopes of a diplomatic thaw.

The president's tweet drew swift condemnation - and some snark - from Democrats and foreign policy experts.

Reacting on CNN, Democratic congressman Jim Himes of Connecticut said Trump's tweet has "Freudians" abuzz and shows an impulse "to demonstrate that his is bigger and stronger than anybody else's".

However, Himes added, a more sobering consequence of Trump's hyperbolic rhetoric is that "it

really doesn't matter what the president of the United States says any more because it's so bizarre, strange, not true, infantile".

Eliot Cohen, a former top official in the George W Bush administration and a Trump critic, said the president's pronouncement was "spoken like a petulant 10-year-old".

"But one with nuclear weapons - for real - at his disposal," Cohen said. "How responsible people around him, or supporting him, can dismiss this or laugh it off is beyond me."

Richard Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, a thinktank in Washington, noted that in the past 24 hours Trump has "threatened to 1) cut aid to nuclear-armed, terrorist-laden Pakistan; 2) cut aid to miffed Palestinians after he alters US Jerusalem policy, and 3) boasted his nuclear button is bigger than Kim Jong-un's. This is our commander-in-chief. Think about it."

Earlier on Tuesday Trump had tweeted that the US-led campaign of sanctions and other pressure were beginning to have a "big impact" on North Korea, referring to the recent escape of at least two North Korean soldiers across the heavily militarised border into South Korea.

"Soldiers are dangerously fleeing to South Korea. Rocket man now wants to talk to South Korea for first time. Perhaps that is good news, perhaps not - we will see!" Trump tweeted.

On Monday, in a speech broadcast live by state TV in North Korea, Kim said: "The US should know that the button for nuclear weapons is on my desk. This is not blackmail but reality."

But he added that the North's nuclear arsenal played a purely deterrent role. "The entire area of the US mainland is within our nuclear strike range," he said. "The US can never start a war against me and our country. These weapons will be used only if our security is threatened."

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"Donald Trump boasts that his nuclear button is bigger than Kim Jong-un's". The Guardian. Wed 3 Jan '18 07.58 GMT First published on Wed 3 Jan '18 03.33 GMT:

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jan/03/donald-trump-boasts-nuclear-button-bigger-kim-jong-un>

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## **North Korea's Kim Jong-un 'open to dialogue' with South**

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un says he is "open to dialogue" with South Korea in the New Year, but has warned the US he has a "nuclear button" on his desk to use if threatened.

Tensions escalated on the Korean Peninsula throughout 2017 over a series of missile tests conducted by the North, and Pyongyang's pursuit of a nuclear weapons programme.

In a televised New Year's speech on Monday, Kim said improving ties between the North and South is an "urgent issue".

"It's a grave matter to which the entire Korean nation needs to put its efforts towards resolving," he

said.

“Contacts and dialogues between the North and the South will expand exchanges and cooperation and we should dispel mutual misunderstanding and distrust, and take responsibility in our role as the main agent for reunification.”

South Korea’s presidential office welcomed Kim’s speech, which included a proposal to send North Korean athletes to Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang next month, the country’s state news agency, Yonhap, reported.

“We welcome that Kim expressed willingness to send a delegation and proposed talks as he acknowledged the need for improvement in inter-Korean ties,” presidential spokesperson Park Soohyun said on Monday.

### **Possible motives**

Al Jazeera’s Florence Looi, reporting from Seoul, said South Korea is willing to hold talks “any time, in any form” with Pyongyang.

“But we have to ask ourselves what is Kim Jong-un hoping to gain from this and some analysts have said that he is perhaps hoping to drive a wedge between the US and South Korea because these two are traditional allies,” she said.

“It is also possible that North Korea is trying to buy more time as it tries to improve its nuclear capabilities.”

Kim says improving ties between the North and South is an ‘urgent issue’ [Reuters]  
North Korea will continue to focus on “mass producing nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles for operational deployment” in 2018, Kim said in his address.

He repeated previous claims that the entire US is now within range of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal, warning “this is a reality, not a threat”.

Responding to Kim’s comments, US President Donald Trump said “we’ll see, we’ll see” at his New Year’s Eve celebration, held at his Mar-a-Lago residence, in Florida.

### **‘Atmospheric nuclear test’**

Our correspondent said analysts were watching Kim’s speech closely to see if he would mention an “atmospheric nuclear test”.

“Weapons experts believe that North Korea has the capability to strike anywhere on the US mainland using an ICBM but they don’t yet believe that North Korea has yet the technology to miniaturise a nuclear warhead and mount it on a missile that can re-enter earth’s atmosphere intact,” she said.

“To find out whether he has the technology to do so he would have to conduct such a test, but there was no mention of that.”

North Korea said it had successfully launched a new ICBM capable of reaching the US mainland, the third test of its kind in 2017, on November 29.

The missile is the “most powerful ICBM” yet to be tested by the country, according to North Korean

state television Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

The UN Security Council imposed a fresh round of sanctions on North Korea in December following the test.

The latest sanctions, proposed by the US to prevent Pyongyang from furthering its nuclear weapons development, were the third set of restrictions imposed in 2017.

The US has said no diplomatic talks with North Korea can take place without a “full cessation” of the country’s nuclear programme.

\* Al Jazeera. 1 Jan 2018:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/north-korea-kim-jong-open-dialogue-south-180101085743276.html>

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## **South Korea offers to hold talks with North after Olympics olive branch**

### **Offer comes as Kim Jong-un says he is prepared to send delegation of athletes to Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang.**

South Korea has proposed holding high-level talks with North Korea next week, a day after the regime’s leader, Kim Jong-un, said he was prepared to send a delegation of athletes to next month’s Winter Olympics in the South Korean town of Pyeongchang.

In a cautious indication of progress in inter-Korean relations after a year of tensions over Pyongyang’s ballistic missile programme, South Korea’s unification minister, Cho Myoung-gyon, said the offer reiterated “our willingness to hold talks with the North at any time and place, and in any form”.

Cho proposed that the two Koreas meet next Tuesday at the border village of Panmunjom, where they last held high-level talks in December 2015.

“We hope that the South and North can sit face to face and discuss the participation of the North Korean delegation at the Pyeongchang Games, as well as other issues of mutual interest for the improvement of inter-Korean ties,” Cho told reporters in Seoul, according to Yonhap news agency.

“We think that the suspended inter-Korean communication channels should be immediately restored. We propose that the two Koreas discuss details of talks including agenda items and the composition of delegations ... at the truce village.”

North Korea has yet to respond to the offer, and the US president, Donald Trump, said on Tuesday he was withholding judgement on the offer to talk.

“Sanctions and ‘other’ pressures are beginning to have a big impact on North Korea. Soldiers are dangerously fleeing to South Korea. Rocket man now wants to talk to South Korea for first time. Perhaps that is good news, perhaps not - we will see!” Trump wrote in a tweet.

The Pyeongchang Games will be held 50 miles (80km) south of the heavily armed border that has

separated the two Koreas since their three-year conflict ended in a truce in 1953.

In his New Year's Day address on Monday, Kim said he hoped the Olympics would be a success and offered to send a delegation to Pyeongchang.

He said the Games would be "a good opportunity to display the status of the Korean nation, and we sincerely wish that the event will be held with good results", adding: "We are prepared to take various steps, including the dispatch of a delegation."

The South Korean president, Moon Jae-in, a liberal who favours engagement with Pyongyang, has encouraged North Korea's participation in the Games, believing its presence could lower tensions on the peninsula.

Last month, he suggested that the US and South Korea could postpone joint military drills until after the Games as a gesture of goodwill to North Korea, where the exercises are viewed as rehearsals for an invasion.

Moon said on Tuesday that Kim's conciliatory tone was a "positive response" to Seoul's desire to see the Pyeongchang Games become a "groundbreaking opportunity for peace".

He added, however, that any Olympics discussions must proceed alongside talks on North Korea's nuclear ambitions, three months after the regime conducted its sixth and most powerful nuclear test.

"The improvement of relations between North and South Korea cannot go separately with resolving North Korea's nuclear programme," Moon said at a cabinet meeting on Tuesday.

Some analysts believe Kim is attempting to drive a wedge between Moon and Trump, who has warned that he is considering all options, including military action, to address the threat from North Korea's nuclear programme.

Evans Revere, a former senior US diplomat who took part in unofficial talks with North Korean officials last year, said Pyongyang was likely to attempt to win concessions in exchange for taking part in the Olympics.

"It is hard to imagine Seoul falling for this," Revere said, noting that Kim's speech made clear he expected North Korea to be regarded as a bona fide nuclear state.

"Implicit in Kim Jong-un's speech is a willingness to engage with others, including the United States, on the basis of their acceptance of the 'reality' of North Korea's permanent nuclear status," he added. "That's not a basis on which the United States is prepared to engage."

It is not clear what form North Korean participation in the Games would take. The figure skating pair Ryom Tae-ok and Kim Ju-Sik were the country's only athletes to qualify for Pyeongchang, but missed their event's registration deadline at the end of October.

Reports said the pair could still be invited to compete by the International Olympic Committee.

**Justin McCurry** in Osaka and agencies

\* The Guardian. Tue 2 Jan '18 08.04 GMT Last modified on Wed 3 Jan '18 00.35 GMT:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/02/south-korea-offers-talks-with-pyongyang-kim-jong-un-winter-olympics>

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## **South Korea offers talks with North on Winter Olympics**

South Korea has offered to hold high-level talks with North Korea on January 9 to discuss bringing athletes from Pyongyang to the Winter Olympics.

The proposal came a day after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said that he was “open to dialogue” with Seoul and that Pyongyang may attend the games, set to begin in the South next month.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in welcomed Kim’s speech on Tuesday and asked his government to move as quickly as possible to bring North Korean athletes to the Olympics.

However, an “improvement of relations between North and South Korea [must go alongside] resolving North Korea’s nuclear programme”, he said.

North and South Korea last held high-level talks in December 2015.

Inter-Korean ties have been at their lowest level in decades, with tensions escalating on the Korean Peninsula throughout 2017 over multiple missile launches by the North, as well as the purported test of a hydrogen bomb.

### **Fresh sanctions**

The United Nations Security Council imposed a fresh round of sanctions on Pyongyang over its weapons programme in December, but Kim, in his New Year’s Day address, vowed to continue focusing on “mass producing nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles for operational deployment in 2018”.

He also warned the United States that he has a “nuclear button” on his desk to use if threatened.

Al Jazeera’s Florence Looi, reporting from Seoul, said South Korea and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), after a year of rising tensions, “feel the Winter Olympics could be much safer with the North’s participation”.

If the talks are realised, South Korea will focus on Olympic cooperation but also discuss improving overall ties, Looi said.

Cho Myoung-gyon, South Korea’s unification minister, has proposed that the two Koreas meet at the border village of Panmunjom, our correspondent said.

Two North Korean figure skaters qualified for the games, but Pyongyang’s Olympic Committee failed to confirm their participation by an October 30 deadline. However, the IOC could “still give the pair a wild card to participate”, Looi said.

The games run from February 9 to 25 in Pyeongchang, a city just 80km from the border between the two Koreas.

SOURCE: AL JAZEERA NEWS

\* Al Jazeera. 2 Jan 2018:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/south-korea-offers-talks-north-winter-olympics-180102071351093.html>

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## **America's UN ambassador dismisses proposed North-South Korea talks**

- **Nikki Haley distances US from Seoul's plan to hold cross-border talks**
- Haley's remarks in clear contrast to state department's cautious stance

The US envoy to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, has distanced the Trump administration from proposed contacts between North and South Korea, saying it would not take any talks seriously if Pyongyang did not abandon its nuclear arsenal.

Haley's dismissive assessment of planned high-level talks between Seoul and Pyongyang was in clear contrast with the state department's more cautious response - the latest example of Haley taking an independent line on foreign policy issues from the secretary of state, Rex Tillerson.

The White House and the state department denied that - in offering to send a delegation to South Korea for the Winter Olympics in February - the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un had succeeded in driving a wedge between South Korea and the US.

But there was a clear gap between Haley's remarks and the willingness of the Seoul government expressed earlier on Tuesday to hold talks with the North "at any time and place, and in any form".

The South Korea's unification minister, Cho Myoung-gyon, proposed holding high-level talks with North Korea next week in the border village of Panmunjom, where they last held contacts two years ago.

North Korea state radio reported on Wednesday an inter-Korean communication line would be reopened at the village at 3pm Pyongyang time.

"We hope that the South and North can sit face to face and discuss the participation of the North Korean delegation at the Pyeongchang Games, as well as other issues of mutual interest for the improvement of inter-Korean ties," Cho told reporters in Seoul, according to Yonhap news agency.

Asked for a response to the diplomatic overtures, Haley told journalists at the UN: "We won't take any of the talks seriously if they don't do something to ban all nuclear weapons in North Korea."

"We consider this to be a very reckless regime," the US envoy said. "We don't think we need a Band-Aid, and we don't think we need to smile and take a picture. We think that we need to have them stop nuclear weapons, and they need to stop it now. So North Korea can talk with anyone they want but the US is not going to recognise it or acknowledge it until they agree to ban the nuclear weapons that they have."

Haley said that there were reports that North Korea might be preparing a new missile test launch in the coming days and threatened "even tougher measures" against the regime if he carried out the test.

Since taking office nearly a year ago, the Trump administration has sent dramatically mixed signals over its readiness to have contacts with the North Korean government.

There have been sporadic meetings between diplomats over individual issues like US detainees, but those died out after the regime's sixth nuclear test in September.

Trump has sometimes declared himself open to talks while on other occasions rejecting them as pointless, publicly warning Tillerson that he was "wasting his time" pursuing contacts.

However, the secretary of state said last month that the US would be "ready to talk any time North Korea ... and we're ready to have the first meeting without precondition".

The offer was quickly disavowed by the White House, which ruled out a dialogue with Pyongyang until it "fundamentally improves its behaviour". Tillerson later hedged his initial remarks, saying the regime would have to "earn its way" to talks.

The year ended without any further clarity on the path to such dialogue - whether a simple pause in missile and nuclear testing would be sufficient, or whether the US would require additional preconditions.

Haley's comments implied a return to the state department's position earlier in 2017 when the official policy was that the regime would have to commit to putting its nuclear weapons programme on the negotiating table in any talks with the US.

**Julian Borger** in Washington

\* The Guardian. Wed 3 Jan '18 05.01 GMT First published on Tue 2 Jan '18 22.26 GMT:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/02/north-korea-south-korea-talks-un-ambassador-nikki-haley>

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## **US announces sanctions on North Korea missile makers**

**Kim Jong-sik and Ri Pyong-chol are believed to be involved in moves to switch from liquid to solid fuel and advance ICBM development.**

The United States has announced sanctions on two North Korean officials behind their country's ballistic missile program.

The steps were the latest in a campaign aimed at forcing North Korea - which has defied years of multilateral and bilateral sanctions - to abandon a weapons program aimed at developing nuclear-tipped missiles capable of hitting the United States.

The US treasury named the officials as Kim Jong-sik and Ri Pyong-chol. It said Kim was reportedly a key figure in North Korea's efforts to switch its missile program from liquid to solid fuel, while Ri was reported to be a key official in its intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) development.

"Treasury is targeting leaders of North Korea's ballistic missile programs, as part of our maximum pressure campaign to isolate (North Korea) and achieve a fully denuclearized Korean peninsula,"

treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin said.

The largely symbolic steps block any property or interests the two might have within US jurisdiction and prohibit any dealings by US citizens with them.

The move followed new United Nations sanctions announced last Friday in response to North Korea's 29 November test of an ICBM that Pyongyang said put all of the US mainland within range of its nuclear weapons. Those sanctions sought to further limit North Korea's access to refined petroleum products and crude oil and its earnings from workers abroad.

With their military, scientific and workers party credentials, Ri and Kim Jong-sik are believed to be two of three leading experts considered indispensable to North Korea's weapons programs.

Photographs and television footage show that the men are clearly among the favourites of the country's leader, Kim Jong-un. Their behaviour with him is sharply at variance with the obsequiousness of other senior aides, most of whom bow and hold their hands over their mouths when speaking to the young leader.

Ri is one of the most prominent aides, and likely represents the party on the missile program, experts say. Born in 1948, Ri was partly educated in Russia and promoted when Kim started to rise through the ranks in the late 2000s.

Ri has visited China once and Russia twice. He met China's defence minister in 2008 as the air force commander and accompanied Kim's father, Kim Jong-il, on a visit to a Russian fighter jet factory in 2011, according to state media.

Kim Jong-sik is a prominent rocket scientist who rose after playing a role in North Korea's first successful launch of a rocket in 2012. He started his career as a civilian aeronautics technician, but now wears the uniform of a general at the munitions industry department, according to experts and the South Korean government.

The standoff between the United States and North Korea has raised fears of a new conflict on the Korean peninsula, which has remained in a technical state of war since the 1950-53 Korean War ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty.

Washington has said that all options, including military ones, are on the table in dealing with North Korea. It says it prefers a diplomatic solution, but that North Korea has given no indication it is willing to discuss denuclearization.

On Tuesday, the Kremlin, which has long called for the two sides to hold negotiations, said it was ready to act as a mediator if the United States and North Korea were willing for it to play such a role.

"Russia's readiness to clear the way for de-escalation is obvious," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Asked to comment on the offer, a spokesman for the US state department, Justin Higgins, said the United States "has the ability to communicate with North Korea through a variety of diplomatic channels."

"We want the North Korean regime to understand that there is a different path that it can choose, however it is up to North Korea to change course and return to credible negotiations."

## Reuters

\* The Guardian. Wed 27 Dec '17 00.23 GMT Last modified on Wed 27 Dec '17 05.17 GMT:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/27/us-announces-sanctions-on-north-korea-missile-makers>

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